

# California State Senate

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## SB 493 (Kuehl)

### *Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Need*

#### *Teens in Crisis:*

All new parents face obstacles as they adapt to the demands of caring for an infant. For the 83% of teen parents who are also low-income, the challenges of raising a child while finishing high school, earning money, and growing up themselves, often prove overwhelming. In fact, only 30% of teen mothers complete high school by age 30. These teen parents, an estimated 50-60% of whom have been victims of abuse, are among the most vulnerable in our population, fighting to care both for themselves and for their young children.<sup>1</sup>

The California Legislature created the Cal-Learn program to help pregnant and parenting teenagers, who also participate in CalWORKs, to complete high school. While enrolled in the Cal-Learn Program, a participant must attend school on a full-time basis and live in an approved adult-supervised setting. In certain cases, a teen may be exempt from this requirement if he or she meets certain qualifications. Cal-Learn provides cash assistance, school support, case management, transportation, and child care – all essential components which can help these teens break the cycle of poverty. A recent evaluation of the program underscored its success; teens participating in Cal-Learn achieved GEDs at significantly higher rates than teens who did not participate.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Slipping Through the Cracks:*

Unfortunately, some teens who would like to participate in Cal-Learn are denied access. Teens may be turned away at the door because they are incorrectly told that an adult must apply on their behalf. Others are told that they are ineligible because they fail to meet either the living arrangement rule or the school attendance provisions. Moreover, when a teen's living and educational situation appears to disqualify him or her from participation in Cal-Learn, no one is currently designated to provide the assistance needed so that the teen can make arrangements to

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Berglas, et. al., *Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing in California*, California Research Bureau (June 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Jane Mauldon, et. al., *Impact of California's Cal-Learn Demonstration Project: Final Report*, University of California, Berkeley (June 2000).

meet the program's requirements or prove that she or he is already eligible. In many situations, it is likely that a teen will find an appropriate living and/or school arrangement if only she or he is given the tools to do so.

### *Creating A Seamless Infrastructure:*

To ensure that California affords all eligible pregnant or parenting teens the opportunity to create a better life for their children and themselves, SB 493 will make two changes to current law:

**1. SB 493 will implement a transitional compliance period, allowing a teen parent to receive Cal-Learn for up to 6 months if the teen does not, or is believed to not, meet the requirements of the living arrangement rule or school attendance provision.**

Implementing a transitional compliance period will provide teens the opportunity and resources to resolve barriers to compliance. This will help teens find out about alternative living arrangements, childcare programs, and/or educational programs needed to become eligible.

**2. SB 493 will require that each CALWORKs office designate at least one eligibility worker to manage aid applications for pregnant or parenting teens.**

This staff member will serve as the teen's point of entry at the office and will receive specific training regarding the eligibility rules relating to minor parents and the rights of teens to apply for benefits. The designated eligibility workers will help teen parents to apply, ensuring that they receive the assistance necessary to become Cal-Learn eligible. At least one county, Los Angeles, has already implemented this change, because help was being unfairly denied to eligible teens.

Designating specific eligibility workers for pregnant or parenting teens within every county will streamline services and ensure that more teens receive the tools necessary for success<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 4 states, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, Washington, provide teens some cash assistance while their living arrangement is assessed to determine if it complies with the federal rules. Two states, Illinois and Vermont, allow teens a period of time to come into compliance with the law. In an IL study of the Teen TANF Applicants since passage of the bill, it was found that in first ten months after implementation, 28 teens were approved for TANF that would have been denied. Out of those 28 teens that were approved, it was subsequently discovered that 15 of the teens did in fact meet the requirements of the rule, but that the eligibility worker had misapplied the rule and would have excluded the teen but for the transitional compliance program. Further, at the time of the study, no teen had exceed the six month limit and been denied further cash assistance. Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor, et. al., *Study of Illinois Teen TANF Applicants*, Illinois Department of Human services (October 2004).